

EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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PRESS RELEASE

“We’re Here for the Long Term”

U.S. Charge d’Affaires, a.i. Geeta Pasi Speech on Operation Sea Angel II

DHAKA, DECEMBER 7 -- U.S. Charge d’Affaires, a.i. Geeta Pasi spoke about the U.S. commitment to help Bangladesh on December 6. She said, “My message is a simple one: We were here before the cyclone, we were here during the initial emergency relief, and we will be here to assist with recovery and rehabilitation.”

CDA, a.i. Pasi was addressing a group of Bangladeshi government and military officials, NGO representatives, and members of the diplomatic community to mark the transition of U.S. assistance from immediate humanitarian relief to a longer term program of relief, recovery and reconstruction headed by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). She said, “Even as we marshaled our resources to respond to the immediate needs after the storm, we also began planning to help with the rehabilitation of the devastated areas as well as preparing measures to mitigate losses in future crises.”

The U.S. military currently assisting Bangladesh will now hand their immediate relief mission over to the U.S. Mission in Dhaka . Below is the full text of CDA, a.i. Pasi’s speech.

BEGIN TEXT:

CDA, a.i. Geeta Pasi

Reception in Honor of Operation Sea Angel II

“We’re here for the Long Term”

It has been just three short weeks since Cyclone Sidr made landfall and left a path of destruction in its wake. We are here tonight to honor those from Bangladesh and the United States who have worked side-by-side to bring hope to the millions of victims of this disaster. In that spirit, I would like to focus my remarks on our long term engagement and partnership with Bangladesh . My message is a simple one: We were here before the cyclone, we were here during the initial emergency relief, and we will be here to assist with recovery and rehabilitation.

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The immediate response by the government of Bangladesh and by my civilian and military colleagues from the United States was truly impressive. Even as we marshaled our resources to respond to the immediate needs after the storm, we also began planning to help with the rehabilitation of the devastated areas as well as preparing measures to mitigate losses in future crises.

As the Chief Adviser told the diplomatic corps earlier this week, recovering from Cyclone Sidr, and preventing more disasters like it will require a long-term commitment, one measured not in weeks or months but in years. Just as we have been here for years helping Bangladesh prepare for Cyclone Sidr, we will be here for years assisting in the recovery.

I am particularly proud of the U.S. military's rapid reaction in a time when every minute counts and lives are at stake. As the Commander of U.S. Pacific Command Admiral Keating said when he visited several days ago, the U.S. military came to get the job done. The "angels from the sea" returned to Bangladesh and worked side by side with their uniformed and civilian counterparts to deliver vitally needed food, water, and medical assistance. When I stood on the deck of the U.S.S. Kearsarge a few days ago, I was so proud to see troops of both countries board our helicopters and fly off together to distribute those life-sustaining supplies to remote villages. What we have achieved over the past two weeks working together has been remarkable.

Since Cyclone Sidr devastated the southern part of Bangladesh over \$19.5 million dollars of emergency assistance has been provided by USAID. Over 15,000 blankets, 2,300 hygiene kits, and 4,900 water containers have been distributed. Tens of thousands of Bangladeshis have benefited from the efforts of both USAID and the U.S. military. Of course, this was the result of a wonderful partnership with the Government of Bangladesh. I also want to recognize the contributions of our implementing partners, and our colleagues in the diplomatic community.

These are real successes that we all can be proud of, but they're only part of the overall picture. To understand the full scope of the United States' efforts at disaster recovery, we need to look back – to more than a decade before Cyclone Sidr came to Bangladesh.

The United States has been a partner in Bangladesh's development for decades. As part of that partnership, USAID has helped to improve disaster response capability in Bangladesh and the region. Boats, water treatment systems, and water ambulances were prepositioned well before Cyclone Sidr hit. Cyclone shelters and warning systems developed in collaboration with our partners saved untold numbers of lives. This is the real story of this cyclone. While we mourn the thousands who died, we are consoled by the fact that preparations spared the lives of many, many thousands more.

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Brigadier General Ronald Bailey and the soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines involved in Operation Sea Angel II will soon be departing. This is a natural part of the cycle of disaster assistance and recovery. But, we know that the job is not done and we are now focused on how we can contribute to rehabilitation and reconstruction needs. The rest of us were here before the Cyclone, and we will remain here well after the reconstruction is complete.

Bangladesh and the United States have been friends for decades. This partnership will only strengthen as we cooperation disaster recovery. As General Moeen says, this operation is an ASHA ALO – a ray of hope. Working together, we can bring that ray of hope to every Bangladeshi who is struggling to recover from Sidr and create a new, brighter future.

Thank you.

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GR/ 2007